A

LETTER

TO THE

Right Hon. WILLIAM PITT,

BY THE

Rev. CHRISTOPHER WYVILL,

Late CHAIRMAN of the COMMITTEE of ASSOCIATION of the COUNTY of YORK.

SECOND EDITION.

1793

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1793

ADVERTISEMENT.

SOME verbal Corrections have been made, and a few Sentences have been added to this LETTER, near the concluſion, ſince it was ſent on the 10th of February to Mr. PITT. Theſe corrections and additions it is not neceſſary to point out particularly;—it is ſufficient to appriſe the Reader that they have been made, but without effecting any material change in the argument of the Letter.

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A LETTER, &c.

BURTON-HALL, *Feb.* 9, 1793.

SIR,

I Have been induced, by the increaſing attention of the Public to the ſubject of Parliamentary Reformation, to prepare for the preſs a Collection of Political Papers relating to that ſubject generally, but in a more particular manner reſpecting the attempt made ſome years ago, by the County of York and other conſiderable Diſtricts, &c. to recover a more equal Repreſentation, and more frequent Elections to ſerve the Public in Parliament. The Reſolutions which were then paſſed by the Popular Aſſemblies on the very defective ſtate of our Repreſentation, contained principles on which a moderate, but ſubſtantial Reformation might have been effected; and when you generouſly undertook to offer to Parliament ſuch a temperate Plan as the ſenſe of the People, as far as it had been previouſly declared, ſeemed to point out, it had

been very happy for the Public, and not leſs ſo for our Hereditary Rulers, if that Plan had not been rejected by the united oppoſition of their reſpective Partizans. By the Regulations alluded to, the great majority of thoſe perſons who had complained to Parliament of groſs abuſes in the Repreſentation, would have been completely gratified, becauſe the Regulations were, in fact, their own propoſitions improved by various modifications, which your ſuperior judgment had ſuggeſted. Already your Regulations, if then adopted, would have operated nearly to the full extent propoſed, and would have amputated, in the eaſieſt manner, at the option of the perſons concerned, many of the ſmalleſt, moſt venal, or moſt dependent Boroughs, and tranſferred, in an adequate degree, and in due proportion, their ſurrendered Franchiſes to the great Communities of the Kingdom, the Metropolis, the Counties, and the great Unrepreſented Towns. This was a mild, a moderate, and yet an effectual Syſtem of Reformation; not ſufficiently extenſive, perhaps, in the propoſed communication of the Right of Suffrage, but capable of receiving that extenſion hereafter, without the leaſt derangement of the Syſtem then improved, by admitting decent Houſeholders to vote for County Members; in the mean-time ſecuring a very important improvement in the Repreſentation of the People; and yet not only avoiding the hazard of a Revolution at that moment, but preventing almoſt the poſſibility

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of ſuch a fearful event in every future period of time. With this conviction of the great utility of your Plan, and with every poſſible ſentiment of grateful reſpect for your exertions to promote it, the popular agents deſiſted for ſome years to preſs the ſubject again on Parliament, or on the public mind. They deſiſted, well ſatisfied with your plan, and your conduct in the proſecution of it, and relying on your ſincere and zealous attachment to their cauſe, they wiſhed for no other advocate, they looked for no greater conceſſions, they aimed only to renew their ſuit by your means, and upon the very ſame terms when the fit moment ſhould arrive.

But ſince that period, particularly during the laſt year, it is evident, that in ſeveral of theſe reſpects a material change of ſentiment has taken place, and it is not improbable that ſome of thoſe perſons who triumphed on the rejection of your Plan in 1785, would now gladly ſee it adopted by Parliament, if at the ſame time the ancient attachment of the People to the Conſtitution of England could be univerſally reſtored. Various cauſes have combined to ſour the minds of a conſiderable portion of the people, and to prepare them for bolder, more deciſive, but more hazardous Schemes of Reformation. Some of the men alluded to, conſider the former advocate of their cauſe with diſtruſt, and abandon his temperate Plan, for the broad principle of Univerſal Suffrage adopted by the Duke of Richmond; while others avow their partiality for a

Republican Scheme of Government, admire the ſecond Revolution of France, and would adopt the principles of it at every public and perſonal riſque. To this Claſs not many of the middle ſtation of life appear to belong; and very few who poſſeſs great conſideration in the country, from their rank, fortune, or talents, ſeem to have placed themſelves at their head. But it is evident there is a tendency to violent change, which, tho' manifeſted to no great extent at preſent, is yet a circumſtance which deſerves the moſt ſerious conſideration. That this enthuſiaſtic zeal for a total, or a very great and dangerous change in the Frame of our Legiſlature, may be checked by the rough hand of authority, ſtraining every judicial and military power to ſuppreſs diſcuſſion and beat down the free Spirit of the People; this may be the wiſh of Mr. Burke and his Diſciples, but it cannot, I hope, be yours. Every man of humanity muſt wiſh to prevent diſcord and confuſion by lenient means; every prudent lover of Liberty muſt wiſh to preſerve the Conſtitution, not only from external violence and the wild ſchemes of Republican Innovators, but from the dangers of internal injury, from thoſe more ſubtle and more formidable Enemies of the Conſtitution, who, availing themſelves of the preſent national fervour of Loyalty, would brand with infamy every man who dares to point out abuſes and expreſs his wiſh for their correction, even on your temperate principles; without which it is plain, that at no diſtant period inveterate

abuſes

abuſes will have become incorrigible, and the Conſtitution itſelf muſt be virtually annihilated.

There never has been a time, in my conception, when it more behoved the true Friends of the Conſtitution to advance, but with due temper and caution, in that middle courſe by which the dangerous extremes of the raſh Leveller and the unprincipled Supporter of every abuſe may beſt be avoided. Entertaining theſe ſentiments, I deprecate a Foreign War as evidently tending on the one hand to increaſe the danger of Anarchy and a forcible Revolution, and on the other of Arbitrary Power and the loſs of Popular Rights; and I wiſh to recommend to the Great a lenient and conciliatory diſpoſition, to the People a firm purpoſe to vindicate their Rights in a temperate way, and with as little variation from your propoſitions as juſtice and the exiſting circumſtances will permit.—For, that your propoſitions of Reform ought to be ſtrictly adhered to, and would alone be completely ſatisfactory to the Public at this time, I cannot venture to aſſure you; but with two additions which accord with the principles of your ſyſtem in the one caſe, and with thoſe of juſtice in the other, I do believe they would be fully approved and permanently acquieſced in by the People. The additions, I allude to, are, that the Unrepreſented Houſeholders in England, contributing to Parochial Taxes, be allowed to vote in the County Elections; and that Elections

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in Scotland be placed as nearly as poſſible on a ſimilar footing with thoſe in England. It was one principal merit of your Plan, and the merit of it was entirely your own, that it provided againſt any great inconvenience from the Inequality which might ariſe afreſh in the Repreſentation, from the future growth of great Unrepreſented Towns and the decay of thoſe which are repreſented, by ſpecifying the manner in which, when ſuch inſtance of Inequality ſhould occur, the Right of Repreſentation ſhould be transferred from the Depopulated Borough to the great Unrepreſented Town. By this proviſion the neceſſity of any future Syſtematical Reform in the Frame of the Houſe of Commons would have been precluded by your propoſitions. And at this moment, were thoſe propoſitions adopted, with the additional improvements which I have here ſuggeſted, they would remove every material abuſe in the Repreſentation of the People, ſilence their juſt and general complaint, and at the ſame time place an inſuperable barrier to defend the Conſtitution, and to ſtop the career of Republican Innovation. This, which may juſtly be deemed a great and peculiar advantage of your Syſtem of Reformation, has been undervalued, becauſe it has been little underſtood by the ſuperior claſſes. The fears of Ariſtocratical Men have been wrought up to an extravagant pitch by the wild eloquence of the Enemy of Popular Rights. He has taught them to believe that their only

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ſafety conſiſts in the conſtant perſevering refuſal to concede the ſmalleſt particle of the redreſs craved by the people; that if a ſingle conceſſion be made, if a ſingle decayed pin in the Frame of Parliament be removed, it would open the door to the utmoſt latitude of change, and the ſacrifice of one abuſe, or one uſurped command of a Depopulated Borough, would lead, by certain and inevitable neceſſity, to all the Confuſions and Horrors of a Neighbouring Kingdom. But were your Plan more plainly unfolded to their eyes, were it made manifeſt to them that it propoſed to be, and undoubtedly would be a final arrangement of the Popular Repreſentation, their fears, it may be hoped, would be diſmiſſed. A Noble Duke might then, with ſatisfaction, apply to your Syſtem of Reform, the opinion which I believe he expreſſed of the extenſion of the Right of Suffrage propoſed in Scotland by a reſpectable Baronet, whom I conſider as one of the trueſt Patriots of that Country: "This I approve, this is good as far as it goes; and we ſee how far it is to go."—Be that as it may, I hope the Publication in queſtion may tend, in ſome degree, to remove the miſconceptions and abate the prejudices of the powerful Few; and at the ſame time to check the progreſs of Revolutionary Principles in the Many, by preſenting a detailed account of the riſe, progreſs, and termination of this popular enterpriſe; a view of the difficulties encountered

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in the courſe of the ſtruggle, moſt part of which remain to be encountered again, with a diſplay of the advantages gained for the Public by regular and peaceful means, and a more full ſtatement, than has yet been publiſhed, of the important improvements propoſed by your Syſtem of Reform; which, though loſt by the diſunion of the People at one period, and their languor at another, may now be carried by the renewal of their united efforts, by exertions worthy of virtuous and benevolent men, by toils without hazard to private Individuals, without inconvenience to the Public; the fruits of which no Political Arithmetic could juſtly calculate, on an eſtimate of the probable calamities prevented by it, and the immenſe advantages procured to the Conſtitution, and to the Public, to this Age, and to Poſterity. Theſe are views which, I flatter myſelf, you do not, cannot diſapprove; and under this impreſſion, I beg leave to inform you, that I think the Publication of ſome of the Letters and other Papers which I have had the honour to receive from you, relating to the ſubject of Political Reformation, particularly a Paper intitled, *Heads of a Bill or Bills for amending the Repreſentation*, would be of the greateſt importance to promote the end propoſed; and, if you have no objection to their appearance, I will inſert them in this Collection. If you ſhould diſlike the appearance of theſe Papers at this time, they certainly ſhall be ſuppreſſed on the preſent occaſion,

occaſion. But to deſtroy them, or to engage my promiſe for their entire and perpetual ſuppreſſion, is what I do not perceive to be neceſſary. They are Papers of great importance to the Public; and, in certain conceivable circumſtances, I ſhould think myſelf bound, by the ſtrongeſt obligation of Public Duty, to produce them, even although your conſent could not poſſibly be obtained.

And now, Sir, having ſtated fully my immediate inducement for troubling you with this Letter, I ſhould naturally think it proper, in other and happier times, to cloſe my letter here. But when I conſider the more than critical ſituation of the Country, when I recollect the confidential intercourſe which has paſſed between us, and reflect that I am indebted for the honour of thoſe communications to the previous truſt repoſed in me, by a very conſiderable Body of Gentlemen, who knew my principles and approved my conduct, and who themſelves poſſeſſed a large ſhare of national eſteem and confidence for their truly patriotic exertions; I feel it to be a duty to you, and to myſelf, to them, and to the Public, not to conceal from you my ſentiments on ſome late Tranſactions and my reaſons for earneſtly deprecating the impending rupture with France, on any of thoſe grounds which have been ſtated, or thoſe undeclared views which may be conceived to operate on the mind of Parliament and of the Cabinet. And though I cannot flatter myſelf that the opinionsofa private

Individual can have much weight in your mind at a moment like this, when the reſolution for Hoſtilities ſeems to be fixed, and the terrible Machine of War is juſt ready to roll on; yet, conſidering I can with truth aſſure you that they are the decided opinions alſo of many of your beſt and moſt diſintereſted Friends, I cannot ſuppoſe that this frank, but not unfriendly, repreſentation will be wholly uſeleſs to the Public, and unavailing either to incline you to preſerve the Pacific Syſtem to which we owe the preſent boaſted proſperity of the Country; or, if that be now hopeleſs, to incline you, as ſoon as poſſible, to return to it; and I heartily wiſh it may be of any avail to recommend lenient meaſures alſo in our Internal Affairs; without which, particularly without ſome conceſſion in favour of Popular Rights, I fear it will not be poſſible for any human prudence long to prevent ſome very calamitous eruption.

I now proceed to repreſent to you my reaſons for diſapproving one part of your conduct as a Member of Parliament, individually; and ſeveral parts of it as a Miniſter, connected with the other Members of the Cabinet; eſpecially regarding the preſent unhappy diſpute with France: but not without this previous aſſurance, that I perform this taſk with pain and reluctance, and for many, many inſtances of your former conduct, I have a thouſand times ſincerely applauded you, and ſtill think you deſerved applauſe.

The inſtance of your individual conduct as a

Member

Member of Parliament, to which I alluded above, is your Declaration of Hoſtility to Mr. Grey's future Motion, when he gave notice in the laſt Seſſion of his intention to agitate afreſh the ſubject of Parliamentary Reformation. I own, Sir, this was to me a moſt mortifying diſappointment. I had before underſtood, that whenever the People manifeſted any ſtronger and more earneſt deſire than was diſplayed in 1785, that a Reform of Parliament ſhould take place, you would gladly ſtand forward again to promote it; and, connected with this reſolution, I approved your forbearing to renew your Motion, and, in fact, to degrade the Public Cauſe, by expoſing it, unſupported by the Public Voice, to certain and repeated defeat. For this reaſon, when Mr. Flood propoſed his Motion on the ſame ſubject in 1790, and you declined to ſupport it, your conduct appeared to me juſtifiable. Mr. Flood propoſed, at that time, to extend the Right of Suffrage to certain Claſſes of Houſeholders; this ſeems a meaſure perfectly proper, though his idea of giving theſe Houſeholders a ſeparate Body of Repreſentatives, is liable, I think, to inſuperable objections; but though he ſupported his propoſitions with great force of argument and manly eloquence, yet, when you objected the indiſpoſition of the People to the Meaſure, and its conſequent unſeaſonableneſs at that time, the truth of your obſervation could not be denied, nor could you be juſtly blamed for not concuring in that propoſal. But, in the ſhort ſpace

of two years, the diſpoſition and ſentiments of the Public had undergone a material change. A ſtrong tendency to Reform was viſible in many parts of the Kingdom, when Mr. Grey gave notice of his intended Motion: Had you remained ſilent, you would have been blameleſs; had you declared your adherence to your former ideas of Political Reformation, and your readineſs to promote that neceſſary work, whenever the ſenſe of the Nation was ſufficiently declared in its favour, you would have acted, I think, conſiſtently with your profeſſed opinions and your former conduct, you would have given a friendly countenance to this laudable enterprize, you would have preſerved your credit and influence with the whole Body of Reformers, and would have had it in your power to model the intended propoſitions, in a great meaſure, according to your judgment, and to have effected, what every prudent Friend to the Conſtitution wiſhes to ſee, a temperate correction of its abuſes, beneficial for the advantages which would immediately reſult from it, and doubly valuable for the miſchiefs it would be certain to prevent.

In vindication of your announced oppoſition, it may be pleaded, that *the Time* was unfit; that is, in the year 1790, it was improper to attempt a Reformation of Parliament, becauſe the People were indifferent to it; and in the year 1792, or 1793, it is improper, becauſe they are become too earneſt to obtain it. From this ſimple

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ſtatement, how unbecoming your character muſt this excuſe appear, ſhould any of your imprudent Partizans unwarily advance it? How futile, how ludicrouſly abſurd muſt it appear when conſidered in connection with the conduct of Government in Ireland, where it is underſtood that conceſſions, as ample as any contended for here, have been, or will be, made at the expreſs recommendation of Government, and *at a time* when it is notorious, that the claims of the People of Ireland have neither been leſs extenſive, nor their conduct more regular, than the conduct and claims of the People of Great Britain. In my judgment, the intended conceſſions there are prudent and proper; it is never an unfit time to do National Juſtice, nor unwiſe to content great portions of the People: But abuſes exiſt here as in Ireland; and the maxims of Political Juſtice are as binding on this ſide of the channel as on that: Why, therefore, is the time objected to here? When conſiderable portions of the Engliſh or of any People complain of abuſes which cannot be denied, the earlieſt period is the beſt and ſafeſt to put an end to their exiſtence.

But the fair truth may be that, on the occaſion alluded to, you were taken by ſurpriſe, and having been long in habits of controverſy with the Honourable Member, you ſomewhat inconſiderately treated the great National Queſtion, of which he had given notice, as a mere Oppoſition Queſtion. If that had been the caſe, and if your Opponent had brought forward his

Motion,

Motion, merely with the unworthy view to embarraſs a Miniſter whom he diſlikes, nothing could be a greater triumph to him, than this apparent inconſiſtency of your conduct.

But I ſee no reaſon to doubt, that your opponent acted from the ſame generous motives as yourſelf, when you repeatedly declared to Parliament that without ſome Reformation there, the Rights and Liberty of the Nation could not be ſafe: And he and every rational Friend to the Conſtitution would undoubtedly rejoice to find, that on mature conſideration you had reſolved to alter your conduct and ſupport his Motion. To form and execute this purpoſe would be an act of reſolute virtue, which I acknowledge ought to be expected from few perſons living; but you have before diſplayed the magnanimity publicly to confeſs an error; and in the opinion of the wiſeſt men, the confeſſion did you more credit than being many times in the right. On the preſent queſtion ſimilar conduct would do your character additional honour; it would be a ſignal inſtance of your ſuperiority to the little paſſions of little minds; it would be a proof of patriotiſm for which you would have the moſt unqueſtionable title to the gratitude of the Public.

It is natural to wiſh that a noble character ſhould be complete, and in every point invulnerable. But on conſidering the meaſures of the Cabinet for the laſt ten months, the Friends of Reformation will perceive little reaſon

ſon to flatter themſelves, that your deliberate thoughts have inclined you to make this ſacrifice to the conſiſtency of your character. In thoſe meaſures and their immediate conſequences they will diſcover no indications of a lenient and accommodating ſpirit, no tendency to any popular conceſſion, or any redreſs of grievances in Britain. On the contrary thoſe meaſures preſent a uniform ſyſtem of authority, harſhly and ſeverely exerciſed; of Proclamations branding with one common mark of infamy, the Leveller and the raſh Republican, and the moſt orderly and rational Reformers, the trueſt Patriots, and the beſt Friends of the Conſtitution; of numerous Proſecutions tending alike to puniſh Sedition and to ſuppreſs the Freedom of diſcuſſion; of Barracks erected in almoſt every conſiderable Place, calculated equally to intimidate riotous men, and to over-awe and quell the ſpirit of Parliamentary Reformation, however pacific however regular it may have been: And the Aſſociations which have been the immediate conſequence of ſome of theſe meaſures, and which have aſſumed to themſelves the accuſatorial power veſted by the Conſtitution in the Attorney-General or the Grand Juries of the Kingdom, if ſuffered to proceed in their career, neither diſcountenanced by Government nor oppoſed by the ſenſe and ſpirit of the Public, what would they leave us that is either ſweetly confidential in Private Society, or open, bold, and generous in the exertions of

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Public-ſpirited Men? It was propoſed, I believe by Mr. Burke to Mr. Fox, about the beginning of theſe diſputes that he would join with him, *to frown down the doctrines of Liberty*. On conſidering the tendency of theſe meaſures a candid man might be tempted to ſuppoſe that the propoſal, to which Mr. Fox gave a generous refuſal, had been accepted by the Cabinet. But whatever was the intention of the Cabinet, the tendency of their internal meaſures has been exactly ſuitable to the wiſh of Mr. Burke, and his political Diſciple, who could prefer the ſlaviſh rants and the flattery of his Maſter, to the friendſhip and manly freedom of Mr. Fox. But though I reprobate the tendency of ſome of theſe meaſures, and the dangerous abuſes which already have been produced by others, yet I am ready to admit that the times are truly embarraſſing to Miniſters, that on the one hand the Great are unwilling to concede, while on the other hand a ſpirit of diſcontent has begun to ferment in the great body of the Nation; and therefore that faults great as theſe may be excuſed in Miniſters ſincerely labouring to preſerve Public tranquillity. For the good performed they deſerve credit; for the evils, which may be the accidental concomitants, they may, within certain bounds, deſerve forgiveneſs. But if this is a valid plea for that ſucceſſion of harſh meaſures which we have witneſſed within the laſt ten months, how

ſtrange

ſtrange is the infatuation which, at the ſame time, can plunge this diſſatisfied country into a war with France, as if the rapid fall of the Funds, the loſs of our Foreign Trade, the diminution of our Manufactures, and the increaſe of Taxes, which muſt be the conſequence of a War, would have no tendency to aggravate popular diſcontent and increaſe the fermentation in the public mind, even if the intereſt of the Nation were evidently the object of the War. How greatly muſt that danger be increaſed, when it is underſtood that a War, of ſuch extent as that with France muſt be, is reſolved on, not for the preſervation, immediate or remote, of this Country or any of its valuable intereſts, not to avenge inſult, to preſerve the faith of Treaties, or to repel the aggreſſion of a declared Foe, but for ſome other purpoſe which is not declared, but which every art of eloquence is in vain employed to cover.

It is ſaid, by the Perſon to whom this Nation may juſtly impute a great part of the perils with which it is at preſent ſurrounded, that the French are a Nation of Atheiſts. The Creed of Rome is ſtill, however, the Creed of their Eſtabliſhed Church, and of the Body of the Nation. But grant that the aſſertion were literally true, inſtead of being a moſt extravagant exaggeration, is Infidelity, or is Idolatry a juſtifiable cauſe of War? Muſt our Miniſter at the Court of Conſtantinople be withdrawn, becauſe the Turk-

iſh Nation deſpiſes Chriſtianity? Or muſt our pompous, and perhaps uſeful, Embaſſy to China be recalled, becauſe the inferior Chineſe are Pagans, and their literary Mandarins are Atheiſtic Philoſophers? Muſt the plains of all Europe be deluged with human blood for a Creed? And muſt we become the enemies of by far the greateſt part of mankind for ſuch a reaſon as this? Even the Enthuſiaſm of Mr. Burke's Diſciples would revolt at ſuch abſurdity.—But the French Republic has been founded on principles of Anarchy and Confuſion; tumult and maſſacre have diſgraced its origin; and, after many intermediate enormities, the murder of the King has finiſhed the horrors of this laſt Revolution, and will ſtain the annals of France with ignominy to the lateſt poſterity. With grief I acknowledge, that a more unjuſt, a more atrocious deed than the murder of Louis the XVIth. is not to be found in Hiſtory. I moſt ſincerely deplore that act of vengeance as a meaſure equally unneceſſary, impolitic, and unjuſt, tending to retard the peaceful ſettlement of France, and to diſgrace the cauſe of Human Liberty in the eyes of mankind; and affecting the intereſt of this Country with peculiar fatality; which, if that event had not occurred, would not have been expoſed to the calamities of War. But what right has England to puniſh the authors of this atrocity, or indeed to interfere in any manner in the internal affairs of that Country? The

domeſtic crimes committed by Individuals, or by the Ruling Power of any Nation, have never yet been held to be a juſt cauſe of War. Crimes of uncommon magnitude indeed have been committed in France; but whether the actors of thoſe crimes ſhould be puniſhed—by whom—and how—theſe are queſtions on which not the Auſtrian, not the Pruſſian, or Engliſh Court, but the People of France alone, muſt determine. When a great Princeſs impriſoned her Huſband, and mounted his vacant Throne, perhaps that Revolution was completed by means as dark and horrible as the late atrocious act which every good man muſt lament. And yet no war of puniſhment enſued; vengeance was left to Him to whom vengeance belongs. But the folly is too apparent for any farther elucidation of going to War to puniſh the innocent Many for the crimes of the guilty Few, and thus wantonly to add to thoſe miſeries of the unfortunate human race, the enormous ſum of which we affect to deplore.

But the principles of Liberty and Equality lead directly to Anarchy and Ruin; they are contagious principles, and the introduction of them in this Country can be prevented by War alone. It were more juſt to aſſert, that all great Revolutions in Government, on whatever principle they may be conducted, are uſually productive of temporary confuſion and many enormities; and, in proportion to the extent and importance of

the changes effected, will be the duration and extent of theſe conſequent evils. But, ſince the obnoxious principles have been predominant in America near twenty years, and have there produced the moſt happy tranquillity and good order, it is evident that they are not principles neceſſarily deſtructive of the end for which Society was formed.—The love of Liberty is an inherent paſſion of the human mind; neither art, nor force, nor any human authority, can wholly eradicate this paſſion: Hence the contagious effect of the French doctrines upon the enſlaved Peaſants of Germany and Poland, of Spain and Italy. Nature meant them to be free; they are conſcious it is their right, and every fibre of every heart beats high with the expectation of deliverance. That theſe expectations muſt be realized to a certain degree in all the great Monarchies of the Continent, ſeems highly probable; a little ſooner in ſome countries, a little later in others; with more or leſs violent convulſions in all, as various unforeſeen circumſtances, combined with the prudence or the inſanity of their reſpective Governments, may determine. England alone perhaps is that European Country in which it is poſſible that the wiſdom of Government might happily prevent any great concuſſion; becauſe the People of England have not to ſeek for Freedom in a new Conſtitution; freedom and equal protection of property and perſonal ſafety, are the Rights which, in ſpeculation, are held out to all by our preſent

preſent Conſtitution. To bring theory and practice more together, to correct abuſes of recent introduction, and to reſtore our Parliament to the purity of its original inſtitution, are benefits which our wiſeſt Patriots have laboured to attain; which our greateſt Stateſmen have thought attainable by peaceful means; and with which the Engliſh People undoubtedly would be content. They are induſtrious, they are peaceful, they wiſh to enjoy the fruits of their induſtry without a War, and to recover their loſt weight in our mixed Frame of Government, without the hazards of a Revolution. By perſevering in the ſyſtem of a neutrality with France, and adopting the ſpirit of your moderate propoſitions of Reform, the Cabinet might preſerve their Countrymen from the dreaded infection of France; but oppoſite meaſures will probably produce a contrary effect. It is from the prevalence of Mr. Burke's Politics alone among the upper claſſes of Society, that the riſe of any dangerous diſaffection in this Country is to be apprehended. To the plain ſenſe of Engliſhmen, a War commenced with France, on his principles, muſt appear to be a War on French Liberty, to beat down the equitable claims of Reformation here, and eventually to deſtroy every valuable Right of the People. Such will be the ſuſpected motives for plunging this Country in a War in which our fleets may be victorious, but in which even our ſucceſſes muſt be ruinous.—For views thus wild and chimerical,

chimerical, the Nation, whoſe wounds received in the late War with America are hardly yet cloſed up, muſt prepare to bleed afreſh: For objects thus odious and deteſtable, the induſtrious claſſes of the People muſt forego their comforts, the ſhoulders already galled with Taxes, the pernicious conſequence of former injuſtice and folly, muſt ſubmit again to new and heavier impoſitions. They will be chearfully voted, no doubt, by the faithful Commons, but the Commons will no longer enjoy the confidence of the Public; every vote of credit or ſupply will then increaſe the general diſguſt; and ſhould no great diſaſter befall us in the courſe of Hoſtilities, ſhould nothing unfortunate break forth in Ireland or America, the mere protraction of the War muſt exhauſt the patience of a diſabuſed People. But what may be the contagious effect of French opinions on a Nation ſick of the War of Kings, groaning under an intolerable load of Taxes, and hopeleſs of redreſs from Men whom they will ceaſe to conſider as their Repreſentatives, it is needleſs to ſtate; to foreſee it is eaſy, to prevent it may become impoſſible.

But theſe, I am perſuaded, are not the motives which preponderate in your mind upon this momentous occaſion, and impel it, with ſo much impetuoſity, to a War with France. Undoubtedly you are influenced by other reaſons leſs unbecoming a Stateſman, leſs unworthy the Son of Chatham.

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The obnoxious Decree by the National Convention of France, on the 19th of November, 1792, has been inſiſted on as a warrantable cauſe of War. But, as a ſubſequent explanation of that juſtly obnoxious Decree has removed all ground of apprehenſion that it is the intention of France to excite Rebellion againſt the actual Government of any neutral Nation, the Decree in queſtion may be diſmiſſed without any farther conſideration.

The obligation to reſiſt the opening of the Scheldt has been inſiſted on with ſtill more force. We are bound by Treaty to the Dutch to prevent the free Navigation of that river. The Convention of France have declared their reſolution that the Navigation of it ſhall be free. But the Dutch, you fairly acknowledge, have not made any requiſition to Britain to fulfil that engagement. Reaſons of prudential Policy, ariſing probably from the diſtracted ſtate of Parties in Holland, as well as from the great Military force of France now poſted on their Frontiers, and ready to invade their defenceleſs Territory on the firſt breach of their Neutrality, may well incline them to peace, and to wave our interference to oppoſe the opening of the Scheldt.

National juſtice ſurely does not require that we ſhould urge the Cabinet at the Hague, againſt the inclination, and, perhaps, againſt the intereſt of the Dutch People, to engage in a War with France. Of the intereſts and of the dangers of

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their Country they are the beſt and the only proper judges. At this moment, our interpoſition to excite them to Hoſtilities, inſtead of being the prudent and faithful diſcharge of our duty, as their Ally, ſeems to be an officious and unſeaſonable interference, which may expoſe them to the greateſt dangers. By perſevering in their Neutrality, the United Provinces might remain ſafe and unmoleſted amidſt ſurrounding Armies. But ſhould they abandon their pacific ſyſtem, at the inſtigation of Britain, it is not improbable, that an immediate irruption by the Army of France may produce in thoſe Provinces the moſt fatal conſequences; a diſſolution of their ancient Government, and a New Conſtitution on the hated principles of France. But in the event of a War theſe impending perils may be averted by timely ſuccour from the Pruſſian Army, and the officious friendſhip of Britain may not prove the ruin of her Ally. This will be a truly fortunate eſcape for Holland; yet the dangerous Policy of our Cabinet cannot be popular in that Country; and in this, more ſpecious reaſons will be neceſſary to juſtify to their Countrymen their eagerneſs for War, than the obligation of a Treaty, for the fulfillment of which no requiſition has been made.

More ſpecious reaſons for a rupture with France are, however, ſufficiently obvious.—1ſt, It has been ſaid that we ought to engage in a War to prevent the aggrandiſement of France.—

France.—2d, It has been thought, probably, that we ought to ſeize this fortunate opportunity to aggrandize Britain.

The firſt of theſe conſiderations has been much inſiſted on by yourſelf in your ſpeech in Parliament on the 1ſt of February, and it muſt be owned that it bears the ſemblance of ſound policy; but, on examination, the apprehenſion of danger to the independence of Europe from the arms of France, will be found, I conceive, to be unſupported by any ſolid grounds, either of fact or of political ſpeculation. The ſecond of theſe conſiderations has not been expreſsly ſtated in any ſpeech in Parliament which has fallen under my inſpection; but as it appears probable that it may have had a conſiderable influence on the Cabinet, and ſtill more on that part of the Parliament and the Nation which is inclined to War, it may merit a diſtinct examination.

On the firſt topic, I am willing to concede, that a luſt of power, which is often the ruling paſſion of great deſpotic Princes, may be found ſometimes predominant in Popular Senates; and more particularly, that the deſigns of the National Convention are probably as unjuſt and ambitious as the views of Louis the XIVth, and in this reſpect more culpable, that a thirſt of conqueſt is contradictory to their profeſſed principles of peace and moderation; and though the Government of France is in an unſettled ſtate,

though much of her wealth has been hoarded or exported, and many of her Citizens have been loſt to that Country by maſſacre, baniſhment, and emigration; yet, notwithſtanding theſe diſadvantages, there ſtill ſeems to remain, to the National Convention, a greater degree of Political Power than was poſſeſſed by that Monarch; a greater population, a more extenſive fund of credit, and a more ardent Military Spirit, pervading the whole body of the Nation. But the Princes already oppoſed to the National Convention, appear ſufficiently able to check and defeat their haſty projects of aggrandiſement.—Since the age of Louis the XIVth, the power of the Auſtrian Monarchy has been increaſed in a much greater proportion than that of France. The diſcontents in Hungary, which ſo greatly weakened the Emperors, who were the antagoniſts of Louis, have, by the wiſdom and ability of the ſucceeding Auſtrian Monarchs, been happily compoſed; and the whole force of that Monarchy may now be turned againſt France, to which it is in population almoſt equal, in the number of its diſciplined troops lately much ſuperior, with Revenues not very inferior to thoſe of the Republic. To this formidable force, let that of the Pruſſian Monarchy be added; which, from inſignificance in the age of Louis the XIVth, has riſen to a rank nearly equal in Military Power to that of the greateſt Empires of Europe. When to the force of theſe

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two Monarchies is added that of the Germanic Empire, Sardinia, and Ruſſia, whoſe power, tho' now ſo preponderant, was, in the laſt Century, little felt or reſpected in Europe; the mighty ſtrength of this confederacy muſt appear, according to the ordinary rules of Political Eſtimation, much ſuperior to that of France; and likely ſoon to wreſt from her, the conqueſts ſhe has made, without the aid of Britain and her Ally.

But what avail the ſuperior numbers and diſcipline of the Allied Armies againſt the ardour and enthuſiaſm of the Freemen of France? Or what credit is due to the common calculations of Political Arithmetic, when contradicted by facts and the actual conqueſts of the French Armies? To this difficulty, I think, a ſatisfactory ſolution may be given.

It is true, in Auguſt laſt the Armies of Auſtria and Pruſſia, then preparing to attack France, and reſtore the old deſpotic Government by force, in the opinions of the moſt experienced Military Officers, were greatly ſuperior to any means of reſiſtance which the French Nation could oppoſe to them; yet ſuch was the uncalculated power of their enthuſiaſm to defend their Republican Liberty and the inſulted Independence of their Country, ſo completely did the ardour of Freedom ſupply the want of diſcipline in the Volunteer Armies of France, that, in a few weeks, the German Invaders were obliged to retreat before them with diſgrace.

Soon after that unexpected ſucceſs, the French Armies, after a ſhort ſtruggle in the Netherlands, took poſſeſſion of that Country and of ſome Frontier Diſtricts of Germany, which, in the proud preſumption of certain conqueſt, the Enemies of France had left unprepared for defence. A ſhort time before this period, Savoy and Nice alſo had been conquered with as little riſque or trouble. But can it be ſuppoſed, that the Volunteer Armies of France will act with equal enthuſiaſm to preſerve the Countries they have thus haſtily over-run? or that the extenſion of the Frontiers of France is an object as deeply intereſting to the French People, as the defence of their National Rights and Liberty? Theſe ſuppoſitions are contrary to all experience of human nature; and they are contradicted by the actual ſtate of the French Armies.

It is obſervable, in the human ſpecies, that ſelf-preſervation is a ſtronger and more uniformly prevailing principle of action than any other, though it may ſometimes be over-ruled by reſentment, or ſome other of the malevolent and deſtructive paſſions. But when this obſervation is extended from Individuals to whole Communities of Men, it is liable to no ſuch exceptions. Nations will always be found to make greater efforts to defend themſelves, than to conquer or deſtroy their antagoniſts. And with this maxim, the actual ſtate of the Armies of France ſeems to correſpond. The Volunteers

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who flocked to the ſtandard of Dumourier, when Champagne was invaded, after having repulſed the enemy beyond the boundaries of France, no longer thought their ſervice neceſſary; they quitted the Army, and returned to the boſom of their families. Of this ſeceſſion the Generals have frequently complained to the National Convention; but the means of prevention were not to be found. Attacked at home, it may be ſafely predicted that France will be found unconquerable; her National Guards will defend her again with equal enthuſiaſm, and with final, if not equal ſucceſs. But that her Armies will be able to retain the countries of which they have lately taken poſſeſſion, againſt the force of the Auſtrian and Pruſſian Monarchs, and the Powers combined with them, is an apprehenſion not countenanced by any apparent probability. It is evident, at leaſt, that Britain and Holland might ſafely defer their acceſſion to the Confederacy till the events of another campaign had more clearly demonſtrated the relative force of the preſent combatants, and confirmed, or wholly removed, the apprehenſion of danger from France. It would then appear manifeſt, either that our interpoſition to prevent any great increaſe of the power of France, was unneceſſary, and thus a great national calamity would be prevented; or, if there were an evident neceſſity for War, to prevent a dangerous aggrandiſement of the French Republic,

public, that neceſſity would reconcile this Nation to the unavoidable preſſure of new Taxes; and thus the danger of internal commotion would be avoided.

2d. But it may be thought, if the Nations at preſent engaged in War with France are more than equal in power to that country, and likely to recover the conquered provinces almoſt as quickly as they were loſt, that ſuppoſition confirms the policy of an immediate commencement of hoſtilities, on the part of Britain, with a view to aggrandiſe this country at the expence of France. How unjuſt is this reaſon for War? How unfit, therefore, either to be adopted or avowed. And yet, in the preſent ſituation of this country, it is not more unjuſt and unbecoming, than it is impolitic and unſafe. There is another, a more ſafe and honourable way to aggrandiſe Britain, by adhering to a Pacific Syſtem, by forbearing to harraſs the Commercial and Manufacturing induſtry of the Country with needleſs Wars and needleſs Armaments, by perſevering in a plan of Public Oeconomy, and diminiſhing the Debts and Taxes of the Nation, thoſe eſpecially which bear hard on the Pooreſt Claſſes of the Community. This is the true policy of a State like that of Britain, encumbered with debts, and perplexed by the diſcontents of its ſubjects. Theſe are the conqueſts of peace; theſe are cheap and inoffenſive ways of aggrandiſement, which would equally augment the

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Political Power of our country and increaſe the means of comfort and ſatisfaction to every individual in it. But, after having ſucceſsfully purſued this policy for ſome years, and gradually reſtored their almoſt ruined country to proſperity and ſplendour, the Cabinet ſeem to have abandoned this Pacific Syſtem as if weary of the tame uniformity of Peace, and at laſt regardleſs of that applauſe with which their generous neutrality to France had been rewarded. Widely different from their firſt peaceful ſyſtem was the policy of the late War againſt the Sultan of Myſore; at the opening of it, France was too much diſabled, by the convulſions conſequent on the firſt Revolution, to aſſiſt her Eaſt-Indian Ally; the opportunity was too tempting to be paſſed, and though ſome recent Declarations of Parliament, proteſting againſt any farther encroachments in India, ſeemed not quite reconcilable to theſe ambitious views, the War was approved by Parliament, and great part of the territories of Tippoo Sultan were ſoon afterwards divided among the Confederate Powers of Britain, the Nizam, and the Mahrattas. And now another opportunity, no leſs tempting, preſents itſelf in the Weſt. The French Sugar Iſlands are in a ſtate of great diſcontent, if not of Counter-Revolution; to take poſſeſſion of theſe Iſlands, and of the other Colonies of France, perhaps, with the previous approbation of the Inhabitants, would be an eaſy enterpriſe for the Fleets of

Britain

Britain. And what good Citizen would repine to pay additional Taxes, for a few years, to ſupport a War of Glory and National Aggrandiſement? By theſe ſplendid objects a part of the Nation may, for a time, be dazzled; it may be deaf to every remonſtrance of prudence, and inſenſible to every impreſſion of juſtice; and while this moral ſtupefaction laſts the ſucceſs of projects which no one dares to avow, and yet, which no one doubts are formed, will be applauded by that part of the Nation. At laſt, the ſtrong preſſure of diſtreſs will make itſelf felt; for it will not be a ſhort War, nor will few Taxes be wanted; the French are combating for all that can be dear to man, for the Liberty Civil and Religious which they have choſen to eſtabliſh, for the independence, the exiſtence of their Country. In proportion to the value of theſe objects, their reſiſtance will be vigorous and perſevering; their diviſions will be in a great meaſure healed up by the neceſſity of ſelf-defence, againſt their common foes, their hatred of Monarchy will be confirmed, and their animoſity againſt the unhappy Family, whoſe intereſt has been the oſtenſible cauſe of the War, will become leſs furious, perhaps, but more inveterate and implacable. Their expenditure will, indeed, be enormous; their naval equipments will add conſiderably to the immenſe expences of one of the largeſt Armies in Europe. Already their trade is nearly ruined, and their taxes

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now very deficient, muſt become more unproductive during the War. But ſtill their reſources to ſupport it are great indeed, and equal to the longeſt ſtruggle, for they are adequate to the extent of thoſe confiſcations, the ſeverity of which we ſo juſtly condemn. In the courſe of this ſtruggle, therefore, it is probable, that the means and the patience of the Engliſh people will be firſt exhauſted; and then awaking from their dreams of glory and vengeance, they will ſee the precipice of National Bankruptcy juſt before them; and whether, at that moment, the acquiſition of three or four Sugar Iſlands will appear a ſufficient compenſation for the miſeries felt and apprehended, is a queſtion to which the true anſwer is ſufficiently obvious. Men enriched by the official emoluments of a War, men thriving under the patronage of the Crown, increaſed by the New Eſtabliſhments, civil and military, in the conquered Iſlands, will think it a fortunate War for them; but the great body of the nation will feel itſelf impoveriſhed and undone by its victories; their property they will perceive has been devoured by that very meaſure which will have fed the now dangerous influence of the Crown to a truly formidable ſize. The alarm for the Liberty of Britain will again become univerſal, as it was ſome years before the cloſe of the Civil War with America; and that alarm, combined with the cauſes of diſcontent already exiſting in the country, may too probably produce a degree of popular effervescence

much ſurpaſſing what was then experienced. I intreat you, Sir, once more to attend to theſe perilous circumſtances, to conſider the actual ſituation of Ireland, the unſatisfied claims of America, her attachment to France, and the probability, the certainty, I had almoſt ſaid, that if the danger of her Ally ſhould become extreme by the junction of Britain and Holland, with the great Continental Powers combined againſt her, ſhe will repay her debt of gratitude to France by defending the Liberty of that country to which ſhe owes her own: And, after having taken a comprehenſive ſurvey of all theſe alarming circumſtances, then ſay, if you can, that the proſpect does not appall you.

I have now, Sir, communicated my reaſons for diſapproving the intended War with France, and alſo ſome other parts of your conduct as a Member of the Cabinet, and an Individual Member of Parliament. For the freedom of this Addreſs, you will think no apology neceſſary; you will readily aſcribe it to its true cauſe. My motives, I am confident, you cannot but approve, however my arguments may fail to make the deſired impreſſion on your mind. I conclude this letter, I muſt own, with much fainter hopes than I began it, that a rupture with France may yet be prevented. The Miniſters of that country had made repeated overtures of conciliation to the Cabinet of London; they were evidently unwilling to enter into Hoſtilities againſt the Britiſh nation. And you, Sir, in your ſpeech

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in Parliament on the 1ſt of February, appeared willing, to the laſt moment, to liſten to terms of accommodation. From theſe circumſtances, the hope was ſtill cheriſhed, not only that a War between Britain and France might be averted, but that, by your wiſe and humane interceſſion, the general tranquillity of Europe alſo might be reſtored.

But the events of a few days have almoſt totally deſtroyed the poſſibility of an accommodation. The embargo laid upon Britiſh veſſels in the ports of France, the unfortunate conſequence of the diſmiſſion of M. Chauvelin; and, upon that intelligence, the more unfortunate order to M. Maret to depart the kingdom, * without having been permitted to ſtate the freſh overtures of pacification, the freſh proofs of their reſpect for this country, and their deſire to continue in amity with it, with which he was charged by the Executive Government of France, ſeem hardly to leave the ſhadow of a hope, that Peace can be preſerved. If a War be commenced, it is my earneſt prayer, that Providence may be pleaſed to ſhorten the calamities which await this devoted country.

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your moſt obedient and moſt humble ſervant,
C. WYVILL.

To the Right Hon.
WILLIAM PITT.

* So this tranſaction is underſtood at preſent.—I ſhould be extremely glad to find it is a miſtake.